

# Compact Cordless SHOP VACCS

These superportable, 18v, toolbox-shaped vacuums make cleanup fast and easy

BY TIM SNYDER

**M**y favorite tools usually fall into two categories: those that enable me to do better-quality work, and those that simply make work easier. Cordless shop vacs fall into the latter category, but that doesn't lessen their value. Now that I know about these nimble tools, I'll never have to stumble through stairway cleanup with a big corded vac, or resort to a broom and dustpan when no electricity is available. There are plenty of other cleanup jobs ideally suited to these small vacs—like sucking up spilled water from a P-trap, vacuuming dust from a small drywall repair, or handling any cleanup task that doesn't require

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Tool  
Test



## MILWAUKEE 0880-20

**CAPACITY** 2 gal. **WEIGHT** 10.1 lb. **PRICE** \$130

This sleek, sturdy little box doesn't give many clues about its function. Beneath the flat lid with its inset handle and large switch you'll find a lengthy hose, a couple of tools, and the same battery used in a large family of cordless tools. Ultra compact but with plenty of power and the quietest operation in the test, this vac turned out to be my top model. My favorite feature is its under-lid storage. I don't have to worry about a hose or pickup tool getting knocked loose, damaged, or lost.



**Stackable for easy storage.** The Milwaukee's flat, hinged lid allows you to stack stuff on top. The attachments and hose store under the lid, so they can't be lost during transport.



# HOW WE TESTED

I promised my editor that I wouldn't attempt any wordplay about how these vacs suck. So here's how we tested to see how different models performed. The dry pickup tests were done using a pile of sawdust, shavings, and an assortment of nuts and screws. For the wet test, I filled a plastic tray with 2 gal. of dirty water and averaged out several pickup times for each vac. As shown in the chart below, the Milwaukee and Evolution models had the fastest dry pickup times, while the Ridgid and the Milwaukee led in wet pickup. I measured hose length by pulling on the hose until the empty vac started sliding on commercial carpet, which I consider to be the effective length.

BRAND AND MODEL NUMBER	NOISE (dB)	FILTER TYPE	HOSE DIAMETER AND EFFECTIVE LENGTH	TOOLS AND ACCESSORIES	DRY PICKUP TIME (SECONDS)	WET PICKUP TIME (SECONDS)
Craftsman CMCV002B	76	HEPA	1.25 in. by 96 in.	Crevice tool, 5.25-in. sweep	29	27
DeWalt DCV580H	83	HEPA	1.25 in. by 36 in.	Crevice tool, 5.5-in. sweep	37	30
Evolution R11VAC-Li	79	Standard	1.25 in. by 48 in.	Crevice tool, brush, 5.5-in. sweep	21	27
Ridgid HD0320	78	Standard	1.875 in. by 64 in.	Crevice tool, brush	28	21
Makita XCV11Z	86	HEPA	1.625 in. by 36 in.	Crevice tool, 5-in. sweep	31	26
Milwaukee 0880-20	75	HEPA	1.25 in. by 56 in.	Crevice tool, 5-in. sweep	26	21



## CRAFTSMAN CMCV002B

**CAPACITY** 2 gal. **WEIGHT** 9 lb. **PRICE** \$100

I like the small size, light weight, and straightforward design of this tool. It's very similar to the DeWalt vac, but with faster pickup, a lower price, and a tank that's easier to empty. The only thing I'd change on this tool is the tiny on/off switch, which is difficult to operate if you have fat thumbs like I do. In terms of value for money, the Craftsman's long hose, clever tool storage, and solid performance make it a value standout.



**Longest hose.** At 8 ft., the Craftsman's hose is the longest by a large margin. This feature is useful for reaching waist-high work with the vacuum sitting on the ground.



## DeWALT DCV580H

**CAPACITY** 2 gal. **WEIGHT** 9.1 lb. **PRICE** \$160

Very similar to the Craftsman, DeWalt's vac offers the same advantages of compact size, light weight, and clever onboard tool storage. One notable difference is the substantial lip on the DeWalt's tank, which makes it more difficult to empty completely. DeWalt's optional dust-extraction adapter (DWV9000; \$15) is worth buying. It adapts the 1 1/4-in. hose end to common power-tool dust-port connections.



**Easy dust collection.** The DeWalt's optional dust port connects to common tool outlets, which makes it easy to set up dust collection on small jobs.

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the capacity or run time of a large corded vacuum. One other benefit worth mentioning is that since these compact cordless vacs arrived at my house, it's never been easier to keep my work van free of debris.

The vacs in this review share some notable features. They all use lithium-ion battery packs that power other tools in a brand's cordless family—saws, drills, sanders, impact drivers, etc. That's why most of these vacs are sold as "tool only." All of these vacs are wet/dry models, and each one comes with a hose and a couple of pickup tools that stow onboard. The vacs reviewed here can also be used as small blowers by inserting the hose end in the outlet hole.

### Comparing performance and features

In putting these vacs through their paces, I was able to assess other characteristics that factor in overall effectiveness and ease of use. For example, all but two of the vacs have big on/off switches you can click with the same hand that grips the handle, even with gloves on. The lower "tank" half of the vac can be easy to empty and clean, or more troublesome. A tank that has an inner lip along its top edge tends to trap dust and liquid. For more details, see the comments on the individual vacuums in this article.

These compact vacs come in two styles. The most common configuration keeps the flexible hose and pickup tools stowed on the vac's top and/or tank, where they're accessible and clearly visible. The storage is clever: Sweep attachments clip into plastic recesses, and cylindrical crevice tools stow in hollow handles.

The Ridgid and Milwaukee vacs look different, because they really take the "toolbox" designation literally. No tools are visible, because they're stowed in dedicated spots beneath a hinged lid. Therein lies the tradeoff: The toolbox configuration makes misplacing or damaging key components less likely, and it allows these vacs to stack and store easily. But retrieving the hidden tools adds an extra step.

### When the dust settles ...

The easiest way to pick from this pack of vacs would be to stick with the brand whose batteries you already own. All of the models reviewed here will easily handle the small cleanup tasks that don't merit lugging around a big corded vacuum. Assuming a battery that's close to fully charged, you won't need to worry about running out of power unless you've got a cleanup job that takes hours rather than minutes. If you deal with drywall dust or other fine particulates, it makes sense to choose a model equipped with a HEPA filter. With a little tinkering and some optional fittings (there's a good selection at [rockler.com](http://rockler.com)), you can even tap into the dust port on a circular saw or random-orbit sander and let your little toolbox vac perform like a big tool-triggered model.

If I had to start from scratch, I'd most likely pick Milwaukee's model over the rest of the pack. In the close quarters of my van, this tool's compact size and stackable characteristics allow it to play nicely with a jumble of tools, materials, and (in some cases) finished cabinetry. □

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## EVOLUTION R11VAC-LI

**CAPACITY** 3 gal. **WEIGHT** 7.4 lb. **PRICE** \$90

This vac is the least expensive in the test, and despite its medium size (compared to other vacs) and light weight (the lightest in the test), it had superfast pickup times. It's the only vac that comes with three onboard pickup tools. The oversize on/off switch, positioned perfectly where you grip the handle, is a real ergonomic bonus, especially if you're wearing gloves. This model was a best-value contender, but it was beaten by the Craftsman's long hose.





## MAKITA XCV11Z

**CAPACITY** 2 gal. **WEIGHT** 9.8 lb. **PRICE** \$225

On this vac, the on/off switch is a dial that lets you select one of two speeds. The #1 setting, designed for a longer run time, left some of the heavier nuts and screws on the floor. The Makita has three filters: pleated paper, foam, and fabric. Keeping all three in place when using the vac for dry pickup eliminates the task of knocking dust from the pleated filter. But the Makita's tank has a large, inward-turned lip, making it more difficult to empty.



## RIDGID HD0320

**CAPACITY** 3 gal. **WEIGHT** 11.5 lb. **PRICE** \$130

Like the Milwaukee, this model stows pickup tools inside the lid, maintaining a boxy shape that can easily be stacked with other tools. Pickup speed turned out to be just average in spite of the vac's larger-diameter hose, and this model is heavier (and larger) than the other vacs in the test. Kudos to Ridgid for including a brush attachment and for an innovative built-in dustpan with suction.



**Three filters for dust.** Makita's fabric outer filter prevents dirt from caking the pleated cartridge filter, which is harder to clean than the fabric cover.



**Smart sweeping.** The Ridgid has a floor-level opening with suction, a feature the manufacturer calls Ridgid Sweep, which allows you to sweep directly into the running vac's built-in dustpan.